

Asian Elephant Conservation Fund



Asian elephant and calf USFWS



In the United States, Asian elephants are best known as familiar circus attractions. Yet throughout their homeland, captive elephants are primarily beasts of burden. An estimated 16,000 Asian elephants are presently tamed and used for timber harvest, clearing forests and agricultural development. Ironically, it is the destruction of forests, the advancement of agriculture, and the encroachment of human civilization that pose the greatest threats to the survival of Asia's wild elephants.

In years past, large herds of elephants roamed freely throughout the forests and savannas of Asia. Today, fewer than 40,000 Asian elephants exist in the wild—about half of which are found in India.

With mature bulls weighing as much as 11,000 pounds, elephants require ample natural resources to survive.

Each elephant consumes more than 440 pounds of vegetation and 52 gallons of water every day. And, each needs a “living space” of 80 square miles.

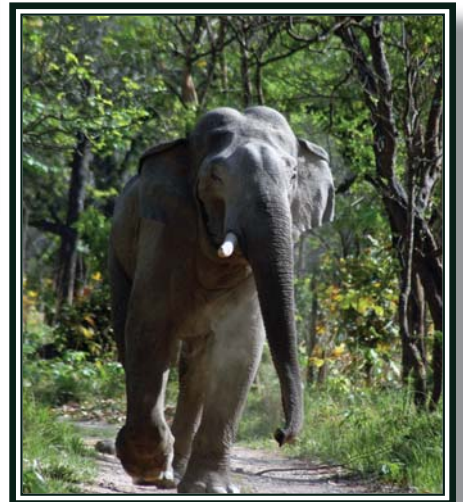
When sizable ranges of natural habitat are not available, elephants are attracted to commercial plantations and private fields of rice, cassava, bananas, oil palm, rubber, tea and coffee. Nightly raids by hungry elephants, coupled with frenzied attempts by farmers to chase the animals away, often result in tragedy. In Sri Lanka, approximately 120 elephants are killed each year by villagers, and approximately 60 people are killed each year by elephants in connection with crop raids.

Poaching, the illegal killing of elephants for ivory, meat, skin, teeth, feet and bones, poses a serious threat as well.

Among Asian elephants, only males have tusks. Asian elephant ivory is highly favored, and centuries of targeting male elephants has left some elephant populations severely

unbalanced with 50 females to every male “tusk.” In parts of India, the poaching of tuskers is shifting the male Asian elephant population towards the survival of tusk-less males known as “mukhnas.”

To combat these threats, the United States Congress passed the Asian Elephant Conservation Act in 1997, which established a fund for protection of the Asian elephant and the conservation of its habitat.



Male Asian elephant ©Udayan Borthakur



Asian elephant Mini Nagendran/USFWS

The 2009 Congressional appropriation of \$2 Million to the Asian Elephant Conservation Fund allowed the Service to support 39 crucial elephant conservation projects within Asia, including:

- Reduce the threats to the elephants and their habitats in the Hukaung Valley Tiger Reserve (HVTR), Burma/Myanmar through continued deployment of Elephant Protection Units, train HTVR staff and others in modern elephant conservation methods, monitor the captive elephant population in order to reduce the threat of illegal captures of wild elephants in the area and facilitate better management of the captive elephant population.
- Estimate elephant population and distribution, and improve local capacity to enhance law enforcement in Cambodia.
- Train and motivate local communities to collect ecological and demographic information on elephants and human-elephant conflict (HEC), undertake HEC mitigation, develop detailed maps on landuse where human and elephants share landscape, develop landuse plans and management through participation of stakeholders, and promote conservation education in India.
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- Developing a human-elephant conflict (HEC) mitigation strategy and operational plan, support the Nepal Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) in setting up mobile HEC response squads in areas of high HEC, train and equip local communities to address HEC issues, and test mobile response squads as an HEC mitigation tool.
- Estimate elephant population and distribution, develop GIS maps and optimal land-use strategies, minimize human-elephant conflict (HEC), and develop HEC programs in collaboration with affected people in Sri Lanka.
- Establish a pro-active patrolling system in collaboration with Department of Wildlife Conservation (Thailand) and the Elephant Conservation Network at Salakpra Wildlife Sanctuary. The patrolling system, Smart Patrol System uses the MIST method of data collection, which is an effective law enforcement monitoring system that is being used across Thailand and Southeast Asia.



Asian elephant herd Belinda Stewart-Cox/ZSL

| Asian Elephant Conservation Funding History from 2005 through 2009 | |
|--|-------------|
| Total Number of Grant Proposals Received | 244 |
| Total Number of Grants Awarded | 149 |
| Percentage of Countries with Asian Elephants that Receive Grants | 100% |
| Total Amount Appropriated by U.S. Congress | \$7,615,956 |
| Total Funds Distributed through Grants | \$7,469,000 |
| Total Funds to Administration of Grants | \$437,259 |
| Total Matching/In-kind Funds Leveraged by Grants | \$9,974,000 |

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CFDA# 15.620

February 2010

